

FALL UPDATE



State Senator Bev Hammerstrom
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MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG COVERAGE

By now, most people have heard that beginning January 1, 2006, Medicare will offer prescription drug coverage to all eligible Medicare beneficiaries. This important new benefit will:

- Be available to all people with Medicare
- Help people with Medicare pay for the prescriptions they need
- Provide additional help for those who need it most
- Pay for both brand-name and generic drugs
- Allow people with Medicare to choose between at least two Medicare prescription drug plans
- Allow convenient access to local pharmacies

If you are a Medicare beneficiary and have Medicaid, SSI, or get help from the state paying Medicare premiums, you will receive a notice from Medicare. If you are a Medicare beneficiary who has limited income and resources, you will receive a letter from the Social Security Administration. Everyone who has Medicare will receive more information this fall. Enrollment begins November 15, 2005. To find out more, visit www.cms.hhs.gov/medicarereform or go to the SSA's website: www.ssa.gov/organizations/medicareoutreach2.

DID YOU KNOW?

You can sign up to receive updated air quality information for different areas in Michigan. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality announced a new program which reports the predicted Air Quality Index (AQI) for the following day. EnviroFlash will send an automated message via e-mail or text messages and provides a forecast notice at health levels selected by the recipient, as well as air quality "Action Day" advisories when declared. This information is especially helpful for people with children; people who work or exercise outdoors; and

those with heart or lung conditions, such as asthma. EnviroFlash is currently available to people who live in or near Detroit, Ann Arbor, Flint, Saginaw, Lansing, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Holland, and Traverse City. To learn more about EnviroFlash and how to access air quality information, please visit www.michigan.gov/deqair and click on the EnviroFlash icon.



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FALL UPDATE '05

Dear Friend:

As the Senate continues to deliberate on budget items, I have received many letters, e-mails, and phone calls from constituents who would like to offer their suggestions and comments on how the state should spend their taxpayer dollars. I have received many helpful suggestions on ways to stimulate the economy, retain and create jobs, disburse Medicaid and school funding dollars, and keep communities safe.

Balancing Michigan's budget is no different than balancing a family budget. First and foremost, we need to operate within our means. Second, we need to cut unnecessary spending. To help determine where we possibly could cut spending, the Senate held hearings across the state earlier this year and received valuable input in regard to which programs were being utilized and which ones were not. Finally, we must realize that, just as family budgets must be re-evaluated from time to time, we must also re-evaluate Michigan's budget and make the necessary adjustments.

I can tell you that budget negotiations are never easy. As I work with my colleagues to balance the budget, it is difficult to try to make everyone happy. Each of us has the responsibility to ensure our constituents are fairly represented in this process. This means there will be disagreements on which programs deserve to be maintained and which ones should be cut. I can assure you of my commitment to balance Michigan's budget without raising your taxes. I believe our focus needs to be on job retention and job creation, as well as innovative ways to stimulate the economy.

As your voice in Lansing, I am always interested in hearing your thoughts and concerns on these issues and any others that are important to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me, either by phone, mail, or e-mail.

Sincerely,

Beverly S. Hammerstrom
State Senator
17th District

ACUPUNCTURISTS' REGISTRATION BILL

Acupuncturists will have to be registered in this state as a result of Senate Bill 351. I sponsored this bill in an effort to ensure that Michigan residents who choose to receive acupuncture therapy will receive the highest standards of care, just as they would from other medical care providers.

Acupuncture is the insertion and manipulation of needles through the surface of the human body for the prevention or correction of disease, injury, pain, or other condition. Although the practice is relatively safe, it is not without risks. Such risks include patient infection from HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C, contracted through patient contact with contaminated needles. There have even been reported incidences of acupuncture clinics re-using needles without cleaning them or improperly attempting to clean them between uses.

A registration program for practicing acupuncturists would promote recognized standards of competence and safety in acupuncture for the protection, safety, welfare, and benefit of the general public. It would also establish reciprocity for acupuncturists within the 41 other states which have established provisions for the registration of acupuncturists and minimum standards for the practice of acupuncture. SB 351 passed the Senate and is now awaiting further action in the House Health Policy Committee.

DID YOU KNOW?

You can order a free credit report once a year by visiting www.annualcreditreport.com or by calling, toll-free, 1-877-322-8228. Be sure to use caution when ordering your report, especially online, and be aware of scams and fraudulent sites. Steer clear of sites or individuals who claim they can "clean up" your credit record for a fee. Improving your credit record requires time, not money. Check out the Consumer Alert on the Michigan Attorney General's website at www.michigan.gov/ag for more helpful information.

MICHIGAN LEGISLATURE MAKES TOUGH DECISIONS REGARDING BUDGET, ECONOMY

Our state is suffering from an economic and unemployment crisis, and that means Michigan's residents and their families are suffering. I am working to ease our state's unemployment and budget struggles without raising taxes and, while that means making tough choices, that is what my colleagues and I are here to do in order to fight on your behalf to get people back to work and get our economy moving forward again.

The Senate has been working on several initiatives to responsibly and effectively promote job growth and economic prosperity in Michigan. Some of those initiatives include:

- Eliminating taxes on new jobs in an effort to increase the number of new employee hires and create new jobs in the private sector. Currently, businesses are taxed more when they hire new workers.
- Encouraging investment in job training through tax credits to allow working adults to further their education and improve their work skills.
- Promoting travel and tourism in the Midwest by making an agreement with other states to create a multi-state recreational pass program known as The Great Lakes Recreational Pass.

Website Updates

Residents of the 17th District have the opportunity to read about current news and events involving the Michigan Senate on my website. Features such as a press release archive, my biweekly publication, "Hammerstrom's Hotline," and other helpful links are only a click away. This information is available at www.senate.michigan.gov/hammerstrom. Bookmark this site for future reference for up-to-date information involving state government.

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES TO INCLUDE MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT DECISIONS

Late last fall, I sponsored a bill which enables any individual to appoint a patient advocate to make decisions relating to mental health treatment with the same authority and within the same decisional parameters as those currently established for medical treatment decisions.

Senate Bill 1464 allows individuals to create mental health advance directives. This permits any adult to appoint, in advance, a patient advocate who will be authorized to make decisions related to future mental health treatment on the person's behalf in the event that they become incapable of making such decisions on their own.

SB 1464 was enacted in conjunction with a bill commonly known as "Kevin's Law." The bipartisan legislation was introduced in response to the 2000 beating death of Kevin Heisinger in the Kalamazoo bus and train station by a person with severe mental illness who was not compliant with treatment. Kevin's Law will allow family members and others to intervene to help secure needed treatment for individuals with mental illness before they become a danger to themselves and/or others.

Whether you are currently receiving medical or mental health treatment or not, you should have a patient advocate, someone who knows your health care wishes and will communicate them if and when you are not able to do so.



Sen. Beverly Hammerstrom was present for the signing of "Kevin's Law," a bill creating an outpatient treatment pathway for individuals with severe mental illness. Joining Hammerstrom are Kimberly McKenna and Charles and Francine Heisinger, parents of Kevin Heisinger, whom the bill is named after.

KEEPING MICHIGAN CHILDREN SAFE

The Michigan House and Senate have proposed a package of bills aimed at keeping young people safe from sexual predators. The Student Safety Initiative is a bicameral effort aimed at protecting children by keeping felons and other dangerous individuals out of classrooms. The legislation requires background checks on all paid school and day-care center employees and prohibits anyone with a sex offense from working at either place; creates Student Safety Zones by prohibiting convicted sex offenders from living, working, or loitering within 1,000 feet of a school; and requires all school employees to self-report any criminal charge to their school district and to the state Department of Education.

The Senate also passed legislation enabling Michigan residents to sign up for a free e-mail service that would notify them when a sex offender moves within their ZIP code. Currently, residents can check with law enforcement officials or visit the state's sex offender website to verify the presence of sex offenders living in their neighborhood. The new e-mail service will provide easier access to up-to-date information to ensure our communities are safe from sexual predators.

